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Thousands of Doctors and Nurses Across America Prescribe Urgent Medicine to Protect Health: Calling on Leaders to Act on Climate Change

More than 4,300 doctors and nurses representing all 50 states urge patients to demand that elected leaders safeguard health with climate-solving action

Oct 21, 2020 – Today, more than 4,300 current, retired and future doctors and nurses from all 50 states issued a warning to all Americans that climate change is a clear and present threat to health and safety. They call on elected leaders at all levels to prioritize urgent climate action to protect public health. The open letter provides examples of how climate change is already causing sickness and suffering for patients, including:

- A 10-year-old child with asthma and allergies who quit her softball team because breathing polluted air—made worse by a warming climate—made her too sick to play.
- A 55-year-old postal worker who suffered heat stroke after she carried our mail all day during another extreme heatwave.
- A 65-year-old man with a heart attack triggered by wildfire smoke exposure.
- An 80-year-old woman who broke her hip trying to evacuate before another 500-year hurricane hit.

The letter is supported by a coalition of 16 national and state-level health and medical organizations (listed below), representing medical societies with over 600,000 members of the nation’s doctors, nurses and other health professionals. The letter urges the American people to demand that leaders act to solve climate change in order to protect everyone’s health and safety now and in the future.

"While we continue to navigate COVID-19, the existential threat of climate change – another public health threat – is accelerating. We’ve seen how the pandemic and extreme weather events impact health care delivery, access, and supply chains," said Amy Collins, MD, Emergency Medicine physician, Massachusetts, Senior Clinical Advisor Health Care Without Harm. “As an emergency physician, I have seen the adverse health effects of climate on my patients. This letter is a critical message from America’s health professionals to our patients – educating them about the health impacts of climate change while encouraging them to support leaders who prioritize protecting health and solving the climate crisis."

While the health of everyone living in the United States is at risk from climate change, some populations are at even greater risk. Children, the elderly, pregnant women, people of color, people with disabilities,
and people suffering from chronic illnesses are disproportionately impacted by climate change. The non-partisan, open letter to patients calls on leaders at all levels to protect the health of the American public by urgently acting to solve the climate crisis.

“Similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, the impacts of climate change are not experienced equally. As communities are experiencing multiple health threats from the pandemic, climate change, and more, it is critical that we ensure equitable access to resources that reduce emissions and promote resilience in the face of the climate crisis,” said Cara Cook, a public health nurse in Maryland, and Climate & Health Program Manager with the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments, “Climate policies are health policies. The time is now for elected officials to put the health of the American people first and listen to the growing demands for climate action.”

The letter calls out the need for elected leaders to protect health with policies that speed up the transition to a clean energy economy and create millions of family-supporting jobs in the process.

Doctors and nurses in training have also signed onto the letter. Sarah Schear, a medical student in California and Co-Chair of Advocacy for Medical Students for a Sustainable Future said, “As the rising generation of health professionals, we are alarmed by the current impacts of fossil fuel burning and climate change on our patients. A healthier future is within our reach, and we urge our patients to join us in calling on leaders to heed scientific warnings and act to protect humanity and our common home.”

"Now, more than ever, we need to be thinking outside the box when it comes to protecting the health of our patients and communities,” said Ashton Lewandowski, a second-year medical student at Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit, Michigan and President of the Wayne State University School of Medicine Physicians for Social Responsibility student chapter. "There is still time for us to take action to prevent climate change from being the next public health crisis but we must be proactive and make sure our voices are heard by our elected leaders."

"As nurses, doctors, and other health providers, we are among the most trusted professionals in the U.S. By signing this letter, we have committed to elevating climate change as a crucial issue this election in support of patient health,” commented Shanda Demorest, DNP, RN, a registered nurse, in Minnesota, and Member Engagement Manager with Practice Greenhealth.

More climate-concerned doctors and nurses are signing the Dear Patients Open letter every day. The letter is endorsed by organizations focused on climate change and health, including:

- The Medical Society Consortium for Climate and Health
- Climate Health Now
- Physicians for Social Responsibility
- Health Care Without Harm
- Alliance of Nurses for Health Environments
- American Medical Students Association
- Medical Students for a Sustainable Future
- Islamic Medical Association of North America
- Nurses Climate Challenge
- Climate Code Blue
- Climate for Health
- MI Air MI Health
• Climate Psychiatry Alliance
• Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action
• Michigan Clinicians for Climate Action
• Oregon Affiliate of the American College of Nurse-Midwives

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